

The Argead Kings of Macedonia in the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiu*

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ABSTRACT This essay deals with a description of the reigns of the Macedonian kings of the Argead dynasty (Philip II, Alexander the Great and Philip III Arrhidaeus) in the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiu (late Seventh Century AD). The author argues that in contrast to John of Nikiu's information about Philip II and Philip III Arrhidaeus, the account of Alexander found in his *Chronicle* is far from being merely a truncated version of the corresponding story given by John Malalas (Sixth Century AD), but has a certain self-sufficiency. Therefore, in the opinion of the author, it can be well assumed that the image of Alexander presented by John of Nikiu holds a special, albeit quite modest, place among the portraits of the great conqueror we find in the Byzantine world's literature.

KEYWORDS John of Nikiu, Byzantine chronography, John Malalas, reception, Macedonia, Argeads, Philip II, Alexander the Great, Philip III Arrhidaeus.

The *Chronicle* of John, the bishop of Nikiu in Egypt¹, written, it seems, in Greek in the late Seventh Century AD (the text survives in a Ge'ez translation made in 1601 from an Arabic translation of the original which is no longer extant too), is among the pieces of Byzantine literature² that have generally received scant attention³. Although John of

* The research was supported by the Russian Science Foundation, project n° 22-18-00493, carried out on the basis of the St. Petersburg State University.

¹ Its edition: ZOTENBERG 1883, with a French translation and commentary. The English translation with a brief commentary: CHARLES 1916. The recent edition of the *Chronicle*'s first part (until the chapter 80, inclusive): ELAGINA 2018, with an English translation and commentary

² I agree with Frantsouzoff, who considers the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiu "a completed self-sufficient work of Early Byzantine provincial historiography" (FRANTSOUZOFF 2010b, 77). Indeed, regardless of what language exactly the original was written in (see n. 3), in my opinion, it is plain that there is no marked difference between the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiu and other known pieces of Byzantine chronographic literature. And consequently, this *Chronicle* written in a similar way (John of Nikiu undoubtedly modeled it after them technically) should be ranked among such works. It is thus surprising that the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiu is usually overlooked in surveys of Byzantine historical/chronographic works. Of relatively recent surveys, see e.g. CROKE-SCOTT 1990; BRUBAKER-HALDON 2001, 165-198; TREADGOLD 2007; 2013; ROSENQVIST 2007, 10-20, 51-57; KALDELLIS 2012, 201-217; NEVILLE 2018. In addition, see JOUANO 2002; 2018a, who also does not mention this *Chronicle* among the writings of Byzantine chroniclers recording the history of Alexander the Great.

³ For general information on John of Nikiu and his *Chronicle*, as well as its subsequent translations (with indication of earlier relevant studies), see JOHNSON 1991; FRAZER 1991; COLIN 1995, 43-45; AUBERT 2000; WITAKOWSKI 2006, 288-289; WENINGER 2007; FIACCADORI 2009; HOWARD-JOHNSTON 2010, 181-189; FRANTSOUZOFF 2010a; 2010b; ELAGINA 2018, xxvi-xliv. On how the *Chronicle*'s translation from Arabic into Ge'ez was made in 1601, and its Ethiopic translators, see now especially GUSAROVA

Nikiu describes the events since the Creation of the world, scholars tend to use his *Chronicle* as a historical source only while studying Early Byzantium, especially the details of the Arab conquest of Egypt⁴, thus neglecting a significant portion of the work's narrative. Of course, such a selective approach to John of Nikiu's text cannot be considered an accident. Indeed, it is only natural that scholars focus on the chronicler's description of these later events, as it is this description that contains very important and in many respects unique information, while John of Nikiu's report of what happened in earlier times is not, with some exceptions, of particular historical value. Whatever the reason may be for the lack of interest in this portion of John of Nikiu's narrative, it is quite obvious that such a situation precludes scholars from assessing his work holistically. Hence, in my view, there is a strong need to devote closer attention to this portion of the *Chronicle*, including the separate stories it contains. One of them will be considered in the present essay, namely John of Nikiu's account of the Argead kings of Macedonia. Another motive behind my interest in it is the fact that, to my knowledge, this account has never become the subject of study.

In his *Chronicle* John of Nikiu only writes of three Macedonian kings of the Argead dynasty. They are Philip II, Alexander the Great and Philip III Arrhidaeus. The passage on Philip II is as follows:

“(58.1 ZOTENBERG)⁵ And in the days of the high priest Jerusalem, whose name was Judas, Philip of Macedon became king. And after becoming king he made war on the country of *Nawasalbat* (Thessaly?)⁶ and won. (2) And after he had gained

2022. On the hypothesis that the *Chronicle*'s translation into Arabic was made in the late Twelfth or Thirteenth Century, see FRANTSOUZOFF 2010b, 80. As to the language of the original, it is unknown exactly. At present it is debated whether the text was written completely in Coptic or in Greek (now Zotenberg's (ZOTENBERG 1883) idea about both languages used for different parts of the *Chronicle* is supported by none of scholars). For this issue, apart from the above-mentioned studies, see a useful survey by ELAGINA 2018, xxxvi-xxxviii. While recognizing the high complexity of this issue, I am, however, inclined to share the opinion that the original language of the *Chronicle* was Greek (see now particularly FRANTSOUZOFF 2010b, 79). Here I would like to mention the two arguments which, along with several others, are sometimes given in favour of the use of Coptic for recording the text. First, it would have been strange for John of Nikiu to write his work in the language of the supporters of the Council of Chalcedon, the enemies of Coptic Monophysites. Second, neither John of Nikiu, nor his *Chronicle* made their mark in Byzantine literature. See e.g. FRAZER 1991, 1367; FIACCADORI 2009, 212; HOWARD-JOHNSTON 2010, 185. In my view, these arguments cannot be regarded as convincing. Indeed, in accordance with the logic of the first one, John of Nikiu should also have refrained from reading in Greek, which was, of course, patently impossible. As to the second argument, it is quite obvious that the Arab conquest of Egypt did not promote further dissemination and hence knowledge of literary productions of this country in Byzantium, especially if they were written by Monophysites and deemed non-essential by Byzantine intellectuals.

⁴ See e.g. BUTLER 1978; BOL'SHAKOV 2002, 103-127; SIJPESTEJN 2007; BOOTH 2013; CHRISTIDES 2016.

⁵ The translation from Ge'ez of the passages from John of Nikiu's work quoted below was made by Frantsouzoff (specially for this article), which I am much obliged to him for. The convenient subdivisions of chapters, absent in the text edited by ZOTENBERG 1883, are adopted by me from its English translation by Charles.

⁶ In contrast to the quite recognizable word Thessalonice given further in this passage, Zotenberg's reconstruction of the toponym read as *Nawasalbat* in the Ge'ez version, is, in the opinion of Frantsouzoff (communicated to me personally), doubtful. Zotenberg has created the following chain of distortions: Θεσσαλίαν → تاوساليان → نواساليات → ናው ሳልባት: (ZOTENBERG 1883, 282, n. 1). Indeed, in some Arabic dialects the long “a” (*ā*) is rendered as *ä* (such a pronunciation is called *imāla*), but the appearance of the

the victory, he founded a city in Macedonia and named it Thessalonice”.

As to Alexander, he appears twice in the *Chronicle*. For the first time, Alexander is mentioned briefly at the end of the account of the relationships between Egypt and the Achaemenid kings of Persia:

“(51.61) Now Nectanabus⁷, who was the last of the Pharaohs, got information from the great diviners (for he himself was a sorcerer too and asked the impure demons) on whether or not he would rule over the Egyptians. And after he had been informed and had learned without a doubt from the demons that he would not rule over the Egyptians, he shaved his head, changed his appearance and fled. And he went to the city of *Färma*⁸ and later to Macedonia and settled down there. (62) And the Egyptians remained in subjection to *Yulyanos*⁹ until the coming of Alexander *Älbantaryos*¹⁰, whose name is interpreted as “the conqueror of the world.” And he slew *Hästäṭas*¹¹, the king of Persia. (63) And after few time Ochus reigned over Persia for twelve years. And after that Artaxerxes reigned for twenty-three years. And after him Darius, surnamed *Akräyus*¹², reigned for six years. And then Alexander rose up against him, slew him and took the kingdom of Babylon away from him, for Alexander of Macedon, son of Philip, was the conqueror of the world”.

For the second time, somewhat below (after his description of the early Roman and Carthaginian history, as well as the reign of Philip II)¹³, John of Nikiu already provides an account of Alexander himself and his conquests, while also mentioning Philip III Arrhidaeus at the end of it (note that it is the only remark on him). This account is the following:

“(59.1) And Alexander of Macedon, son of Philip, when he became king, founded the great city of Alexandria in the country of Egypt and named it Alexandria after his name, (2) and its name formerly was *Rakudi* in the language of the Egyptians¹⁴. After that he waged war on the country of Persia until the boundaries of *Awaziz* (Europe?)¹⁵ and built a place there where his soldiers and all his forces gathered.

wāw after it is difficult to explain. The doubts of Frantsouzoff seem to me well founded. Yet, in view of the fact that while composing his account of Philip II, John of Nikiu followed that of Malalas rather exactly (albeit abridging it), he appears to have indeed mentioned Thessaly in this passage (especially as because there were no grounds for him to mention something else instead of it, and namely the word Thessaly was necessary for the explanation of the origin of Thessalonice’s name). Therefore it seems highly probable that this toponym was distorted not by John of Nikiu, but already at the level of either later translators or copyists, maybe ignorant of Thessaly (note that this Greek region is no longer mentioned in John of Nikiu’s *Chronicle*).

⁷ *Säktanafus*. For the forms of this name, see n. 19.

⁸ Pelusium; *al-Faramā*, in Arabic.

⁹ See below.

¹⁰ According to Zotenberg, it corresponds to the Greek word ὁ πάνταρχος (ZOTENBERG 1883, 276; similarly: COLIN 1995, 54). It is indeed likely, since its meaning (“master of all”, “master of the world”) conforms, albeit not very strictly, to the interpretation of Alexander’s name occurred further in the text.

¹¹ See below.

¹² The correct form of this name remains unclear to Zotenberg (1883, 276, n. 4).

¹³ See the passage about Philip II above.

¹⁴ *R’-qdt*, in Egyptian; Ῥακῶτις, in Greek (the corrupted form Ῥακοῦστις is given by Malalas in 8.1; see below).

¹⁵ Zotenberg’s identification of this toponym as Europe (ZOTENBERG 1883, 282 n. 3), while seemingly matching what is written in Malalas’ text (see 8.1 below), is controversial. Could it have been used to

And he gave there plenty of gold to his warlords, all his commanders and his numerous forces and named that place Chrysopolis. And so it is called by all the inhabitants of Byzantium¹⁶. (3) And when Alexander warred against Persia, he slew many of Darius' soldiers until he exterminated them. And he seized the whole kingdom of Darius and assumed power in it. (4) Besides, he seized his daughter named Roxana, and she was a virgin, and he took her to wife and did not mistreat her. (5) Neither did he any harm to Candace, the queen of Abyssinia, due to her great intelligence, for she had heard stories of Alexander's deeds and his customs – how he set off together with his spies when he wanted to wage war on the kings of the earth. (6) And so queen Candace recognized him, when he came to her with the spies, arrested him and told him, “You are Alexander who seized the whole world, and today you are seized by a woman.” (7) And he told her, “It is due to your knowledge, the refinement of your mind and your wisdom that you seized me. From now on I shall keep you safe from harm, you and your children, and I shall take you to wife.” (8) And once she heard it, she knelt at his feet and made an alliance with him, and he took her to wife. And after that the Abyssinians submitted to him. (9) And when Alexander was dying, he divided his kingdom between his four companions who had helped him in his wars. (10) Philip, his elder brother, took the country of Macedonia and became king in it and in all Europe [...]”.

In his description of these events (and to a large extent, of the ones up to the end of the reign of Justinian I) John of Nikiu immediately draws on the writing of another John, namely John Malalas (Sixth Century AD)¹⁷. To make sure of this, it is enough merely to compare the above-cited passages with the corresponding parts of Malalas' text:

(7.17)¹⁸ [...] Nektanabo¹⁹ was then reigning over the Egyptians; he had used divination with a dish and learnt that Ochos, king of the Persians, was destined to capture Egypt. So he shaved the hair from his head and changed his royal garments, and fled by way of Pelousion and lived out his life in Pella, a city in Macedonia.

At that time occurred the notorious events concerning Olympias and Nektanebo, that she was seduced by him by some trick and conceived Alexander, who, they

denote Asia? Compare it with the designation used for Europe by John of Nikiu in 59.10: “[...] in all Europe (*Awurya*)”.

¹⁶ It is likely the city of Byzantion meant by Byzantium here. Cf. ZOTENBERG 1883, 282 n. 4.

¹⁷ I believe that it is plane. However, see ELAGINA 2018, xxxi-xxxii, who, in my opinion, is excessively cautious, doubting the point that John of Nikiu drew directly on Malalas' work. Indeed, taking into account a striking general similarity between these two texts, it is quite unclear why there should be any need to admit aught else apart from John of Nikiu's having immediate access to the work of Malalas. As to a number of discrepancies between the text of John of Nikiu and that of Malalas, they can be easily attributed to the state of latter' manuscript legacy and to John of Nikiu's familiarity with other sources that allowed him to supplement and correct Malalas' narrative, when he found it necessary. On such supplements and corrections in the above-cited passages, see below.

¹⁸ Translated by JEFFREYS-JEFFREYS-SCOTT 2017. The only changes I made in the below-given translation are related to the term βασιλεύς that the scholars have translated throughout Malalas' text as “emperor”. Indeed, it should be taken into account that the versatility of the term βασιλεύς well allowed Malalas to apply it to various rulers he mentioned in his work. Hence, in my view, while translating, it is better to make a distinction between “king” in Malalas' earlier books (including books 7 and 8) and “emperor” in his later ones. Cf. JEFFREYS-JEFFREYS-SCOTT 2017, xxiv; besides: JEFFREYS 1990b, 229. At the same time, note that when referring to Malalas' writing further in this essay, I shall rely on its edition in Greek by Thurn.

¹⁹ Νεκτανάβω. The usual forms of this name in Greek are Νεκτανεβός/-βῶς. *Nht-Hr-Hbyt* (Nectanebo II), in Egyptian. Following Malalas, John of Nikiu repeats his form of the ruler's name.

say, was conceived by Zeus Ammon. Thus the first empire of the Egyptians and Thebans lasted for 1493 years. The learned chronicler Eirenaios has related this.

(18) [...] Then the Assyrians and Ochos, their king, became conceited; they usurped power over the whole earth and the empire was given into the hands of the Assyrians, the Persians, the Medes and the Parthians.

(19) Philip reigned over Macedonia for 20 years. When he had conquered and subjugated Thessaly, he built a city in Macedonia which he called Thessalonike, it having previously been known as the town of Thermai. Dionysios states that it was called Thessalonike later after a queen in Philip's family. The empire, or toparchy, of Macedonia lasted for 602 years, until the reign of Philip, as the most learned Eusebios Pamphilou has chronicled.

After Philip, Alexander, the son of Philip, ruled Macedonia.

After Ochos, Dareios the Mede, the son of Assalam, reigned over the Babylonians and had power over all men [...]

(8.1) In the fourth year of the reign of Dareios the Mede, son of Assalam, God raised up Alexander, toparch or king of Macedonia, the son of Philip, against the Assyrians, Persians, Parthians and Medes. Alexander built Alexandria the Great, which was previously known as the town of Rakoustis, and named it Alexandria after himself, sacrificing a virgin girl whom he called Macedonia. He built a temple to Serapis Helios and a public bath, which is called The Horse, and other temples. The king Alexander, having won the support of united and valiant generals in his anger at the Assyrians' folly, was the first to engage Dareios, king of the Persians, in battle.

Arriving at Byzoupolis in Europe, he built a place there which he called the Strategion, for it was there that he practiced his generalship with his army and his allies. He crossed over from there with his army to a trading-station in Bithynia known as Diskoi. Wishing to win over his army, he issued them there with a great deal of gold and he changed the name of this trading-station to Chrysopolis, which it is called to the present day.

He set out from there and arrived at Troy. After offering a sacrifice at Achilles' tomb, since he was descended from his family (for Olympias, Alexander of Macedon's mother, was descended from Molossos, the son of Pyrrhos and Andromache), he prayed for his spirit to fight on his side in the war. Alexander immediately set out from there like a leopard and captured all lands with his generals. He defeated Dareios, king of the Persians, the son of Assalam, and captured him, all his empire, all the land of the Assyrians, Medes, Parthians, Babylonians and Persians and all the empires on earth, as the most learned Bottios has written. Alexander freed the cities and territories and all the land of the Romans, Hellenes and Egyptians from subjection and slavery to Assyrians, Persians, Parthians and Medes; he restored to the Romans all that they had lost.

(2) Thus from Adam to Alexander of Macedon's victory there were 5557 years [...]

(3) The Persian region and its empires were overthrown at that time; the Macedonians and Alexander, together with his allies, established dominion over the land of the Chaldaeans, Medes, Persians and Parthians. After defeating and killing Dareios, they succeeded to his empires. Alexander made laws for their territory and reigned over them. The Persians erected a bronze equestrian statue of him in Babylon which stands to the present day.

Alexander captured Roxane, the daughter of Dareios, king of the Persians; she was a virgin, and he married her. Alexander also captured all the regions of India and their empires, taking prisoner Poros, king of the Indians; he also captured all the other empires of barbarian peoples, except the empire of the widow Kandake, who reigned over the Indians of the interior. She caught Alexander in the following way.

Alexander was in the habit of going in soldier's clothes with ambassadors whom he sent to opposing kings, to see what the king in question was like. The queen Kandake learnt of this and made a thorough investigation to discover what he looked like and what identifying marks he had. She was told that he was short, with large prominent teeth and one grey eye and one black. She took private note of this. When he came to her with the ambassadors he sent, she recognized him by the identifying marks. She arrested him and said, "King Alexander, you have captured the whole world but one woman has captured you". Alexander said to her, "Because of the excellence and the quickness of your mind, I shall preserve from harm you, your land and your sons, and I shall take you to wife". On hearing this, Kandake surrendered herself. Alexander took her with him immediately and went to Ethiopia and other countries.

(4) When Alexander was on the point of death, he ordained that all the champions and allies with him should reign over the territory where he had left them and should control the lands there. Alexander lived for 36 years and, having subjugated the world, reigned for 17 years. The war lasted 9 years and he subjugated 22 barbarian nations and 13 Hellenic tribes, and he and those with him built many cities.

Thus from Adam to the death of Alexander there were 5593 years, as Theophilus the chronicler has written.

(5) After the death of Alexander of Macedon, the lands which Alexander had subjugated with his allies were divided into four toparchies or empires. Alexander's Macedonian comrades reigned over these in the following way, just as he had ordained. Macedonia and all Europe were to be controlled and ruled by his elder brother Philip [...]

It is thus obvious that John of Nikiu, having before him Malalas' work, transferred the information about the three Macedonian kings found in it to his *Chronicle* (as one can see, this information is a bizarre combination of historical facts, inaccuracies, mistakes and even blatant inventions). What makes his text different from that of Malalas is caused by John of Nikiu's abridging and sometimes supplementing it. Below I am going to clear up what John of Nikiu's motives were when he changed Malalas' account of the Argead kings²⁰. Additionally, it seems that it will enable us to understand better the manner in which John of Nikiu worked on the rest of his narrative, or at least its part for which Malalas' writing served as a principal source.

Let us start with John of Nikiu's account of Philip II. Drawing on the corresponding passage in Malalas, John of Nikiu abridged it. Apart from the very fact of Philip's reign, he only preserved the first of the two explanations of the name of Thessalonice cited by Malalas²¹. His ignoring the second explanation (which, incidentally, is much more close to reality than the first one)²² shows that the chronicler had no special interest in the foundation of Thessalonice. It appears that John of Nikiu gave one of Malalas' versions of the origin of this city's name (which he found credible) mostly to enter Thessalonice into his narrative, taking into account its importance in connection with further events²³.

²⁰ Of course, it cannot be ruled out that John of Nikiu's original text itself was abridged (and maybe even somewhat supplemented) later, i.e. in the process of translators' activities. However, it does not seem possible, at least in the passages concerning the Argead kings, to discover distinct traces of such modifications. Therefore it should be considered the best course of action to ascribe all the abridgements of Malalas' text (and supplements to it) solely to John of Nikiu.

²¹ See n. 6.

²² In fact, the city was founded by the Macedonian king Cassander (ca. 316/5 BC) and named after his wife Thessalonice, the daughter of Philip II. On it, see e.g. COHEN 1995, 101-105.

²³ See below in the *Chronicle*: 83.15,41; 109.18.

Moreover, John of Nikiu's report on Philip II as a whole looks like it was of no particular interest to the chronicler too. It seems he needed it just to introduce his reader to the main account of Alexander. As to John of Nikiu's remark on Philip III Arrhidaeus (also based on Malalas' respective record), it clearly plays a supportive role as well. It should take the reader out of the account of Alexander, thus serving as a bridge to the events happening in the times of the Diadochoi and Epigonoι. Likewise, an auxiliary significance of the account of Philip II and the remark on Philip III Arrhidaeus in John of Nikiu's text is also confirmed by the fact that he completely neglected Malalas' information about the kings who reigned in Macedonia both before Philip II (6.16 Thurn) and after Philip III Arrhidaeus (8.5 Thurn).

Turning to John of Nikiu's narrative of Alexander, I shall focus first on the story of Nectanebo. Undoubtedly, the episode of Nectanebo's flight from Egypt to Macedonia and his sojourn there was borrowed by Malalas (or his source) from the Greek *Alexander Romance* of Ps.-Callisthenes (1.1–12 Kroll)²⁴. Malalas himself gives a very brief version of this episode, mentioning that the events concerning Nectanebo and Olympias, how he managed to seduce her, who conceived Alexander as a result, are "notorious" (θρυλούμενα). John of Nikiu is even more concise. He omits the story of Alexander's conception from Nectanebo altogether. One can only guess at the reason for this omission. It cannot be ruled out that John of Nikiu merely found this story questionable and therefore unworthy of being included in the text, similar to an author of the *Chronicon Paschale* (170a Dind.) (first half of the Seventh Century AD), whose work John of Nikiu might have also consulted in this case (at least it is remarkable that he, like in the *Chronicon Paschale*, calls Nectanebo "the last of the Pharaohs", while Malalas fails to mention that)²⁵. Perhaps such a position of John of Nikiu was caused by his negative stance on Nectanebo, which is obvious from the text (unlike Malalas, whose attitude towards Nectanebo is rather neutral). It appears he could hardly acknowledge as credible that Alexander –who for John of Nikiu, like for other Byzantine chroniclers, was undoubtedly a positive person²⁶– was born (even if by

²⁴ The question of sources used for Malalas' work, including his account of the Argead kings of Macedonia, is complex and hence debatable. On this question in general, see especially BOURIER 1899; JEFFREYS 1990a; for some specific aspects, see now also a collection of articles: CARRARA–MEIER–RADTKI–JANSEN 2017. As to Malalas' account of the Argead kings, although it contains references to Bottius, Dionysius, Eirenaeus, Eusebius and Theophilus (on each of these authors, see JEFFREYS 1990a, 174, 178, 179, 180, 194), there are grounds to believe that none of them actually served as Malalas' source (moreover, they most probably were known to him only indirectly, at second or even third hand). Insofar as we are able to judge, the author whose text Malalas used immediately, while composing his account of the Argead kings (and also a significant portion of his further narrative), was Domninus (Ioann. Mal. praef. Thurn), a historian of the Fifth Century AD (for him, see JEFFREYS 1990a, 178–179). See BOURIER 1899, 58–61; JEFFREYS 1990a, 196–216; cf. JOUANNO 2001, 94 n. 5; 2018b, 464. However, it is difficult to say whether Domninus, whose work is no longer extant, served as Malalas' only source in this case. At least, in my view, it cannot be completely ruled out that Malalas was familiar with Ps.-Callisthenes' *Alexander Romance* (the α recension) himself and not via Domninus, although he does not mention it among his sources. Of works on the Greek *Alexander Romance*, see, in particular, MERKELBACH 1977; STONEMAN 1991; NAWOTKA 2017. For Malalas' drawing on the α recension of the *Alexander Romance*, its oldest version (most likely the second half of the Third Century AD), see JOUANNO 2001, 94–95 n. 4; cf. JOUANNO 2018a, 226; 2018b, 464. When mentioning the *Alexander Romance* further in the present essay, I shall mean just the α recension of this writing.

²⁵ 51.61: ተፍጻሜተ: ፈርዖናት:; *Chr. Pasch.* 170a Dind.: βασιλεύς τελευταῖος Αἰγύπτου, Φαραὼ κεκλημένος. Cf. *Exc. lat. barb.* p. 266, Frick: *novissimus Farao regni Egypti* (on this work, see n. 31).

²⁶ For this, see especially JOUANNO 2001; 2018a. Besides, on the image of Alexander in Byzantine literature in general, see e.g. JOUANNO 2000–2001, 310–321; 2018b; MOENNIG 2016, 163–180; KALDELLIS 2022.

means of a trick) from a sorcerer king associating with other “great diviners” and “impure demons”²⁷. Furthermore, John of Nikiu puts the account of Nectanebo in the context of Egyptian history and does not connect his reign, like Malalas, with the idea of the succession of universal empires. Therefore it is possible too that John of Nikiu omitted the story of Alexander’s conception in Macedonia, since he regarded it, in addition to his skepticism about its credibility, as being directly unrelated to the chain of Egyptian events he described.

At the same time, it should be noted that while expounding these events John of Nikiu did not draw on the writing of Malalas (only the episode of Nectanebo is borrowed from there), but on another, lost source (or sources), presumably of Egyptian origin, that contained information on the local history of the country, particularly on the relationships between the Egyptians and the Persians. While the beginning of John of Nikiu’s use of this source (or sources) coincides with his indication on Cambyses’ enthronement, when he strays from Malalas’ narrative (51.17)²⁸, the end can be clearly established right after the words about Alexander’s slaying Darius, named *Həṣṭaṭas*, i.e. most likely Hystaspes²⁹. Indeed, besides the fact that this is the conclusion of the Egyptian theme, the “splice” here can easily be detected because of the narrative’s referring again to earlier events and then, at the end of the corresponding passage, repeating the information about Alexander’s slaying Darius. Unfortunately, it is also impossible to identify the source for this new passage. Nevertheless, taking into consideration that it lists the Persian kings, while indicating the duration of their reigns, and finally mentions Alexander as the one defeating Darius and seizing his kingdom, we can assume that it was a chronographic work that did not survive to this day.

It is difficult to discover who was to blame for the mistakes and confusion found in John of Nikiu’s description of events after his reference to Nectanebo’s flight from Egypt. However, the fact that the information the chronicler derived from Malalas’ text is given by him in his narrative rather accurately, implies a similar approach to working

²⁷ Cf. YIRGA 2020, 105-106.

²⁸ Undoubtedly, the following part of this chapter (17-50) offers close parallels to the so-called *Cambyses Romance* (their selection: CRUZ-URIBE 1986, 52; HABAJ 2018b, 153-154), an anonymous work surviving fragmentarily in a manuscript written in Sahidic Coptic (in additions to lacunae in the text itself, the manuscript lacks the opening and the final sections). Its first publication: SCHÄFER 1899. For this writing in general and the problems connected with it, see JANSEN 1950, 1-59; CRUZ-URIBE 1986; MÜLLER 1991; ELAGINA 2018, xxxiii-xxxiv. Of recent studies that focus on the *Cambyses Romance*, see HABAJ 2018a; 2018b. At the same time, it must be admitted (see the above-mentioned works) that there is no *communis opinio* about the date of composing of the *Cambyses Romance*, and therefore it is unclear whether it was created earlier or later than the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiu. Nevertheless, regardless of possible answers to this question, in my opinion, it is hardly worth agreeing with those scholars who argue that either the *Cambyses Romance* was the source for chapter 51 of John of Nikiu’s work or *vice versa* (let alone with the hypothesis that he was the author of both texts; cf. CRUZ-URIBE 1986, 55). In this case it seems better to think about a common tradition which either author (whether directly or through some agency) drew on independently (cf. HABAJ 2018a, 632, 635; 2018b, 152-156).

²⁹ According to Frantsouzoff’s view (expressed to me personally), the corruption of this name resulted in the form *Həṣṭaṭas* (cf. Greek Ὑστάσπης). If so, then, I believe, entirely possible that John of Nikiu simply confused Darius I, son of Hystaspes, with Darius III, both of whom were likely indicated together in his source, and while mentioning the former, he for some reason (maybe by negligence) only preserved the patronymic. At the same time, note that although Zotenberg failed to interpret this form (ZOTENBERG 1883, 276 n. 3), he referred to the opinion of Noeldeke, who suggested that it was the Greek word ὕστατος rendered in this way (NOELDEKE, 1881, 594; cf. COLIN 1995, 54). This opinion is, however, made less credible due to the following consideration: since in chapter 51 of the *Chronicle* all the Persian kings, with a single exception (60), are mentioned by their personal names, it would be logical to expect from John of Nikiu the same designation of Darius III too (especially when he first introduces this monarch), and not the descriptive one as Noeldeke assumes.

with other sources, including those he used in this fragment concerning Alexander. In other words, it appears that the responsibility for the absurdities found in it should rest with the sources that John of Nikiu used (and in one case, when a certain *Yulyanos* is suddenly mentioned, with a later translator or a copyist)³⁰ rather than the chronicler himself, although, of course, he could also have been at fault for some of them, whether being negligent or failing to understand what he had read.

From the next chapter (52) on, John of Nikiu again resorts to Malalas' text as his principal source, using it in this capacity to create another, more detailed account of Alexander and his deeds.

Starting it, John of Nikiu omits the words of Malalas, who, in line with the providential view of history typical of Byzantine chroniclers, depicts Alexander as the instrument of God's intent destined to destroy the empire of the Persians (and other nations that Malalas associates with them)³¹. Instead, John of Nikiu merely provides information about Alexander's accession to the throne, which can be explained by the point that he most probably did not share the idea of the succession of universal empires, as evidenced by his dismissal of this idea in his *Chronicle*, despite Malalas' active exploitation of it. Perhaps John of Nikiu's skeptical attitude towards such an idea was caused by the consideration that the Arab conquests, including the subjugation of his Egypt, did not fit it properly, and so it could have seemed doubtful to him. Therefore it seems not surprising that in his further narrative of Alexander John of Nikiu chooses not to repeat Malalas' corresponding remarks, specifically his comparing Alexander to a leopard (ὡς πάρδαλις) that was inspired by the *Book of Daniel* (7:6), in which the leopard is the third of the four beasts (ὡσεὶ πάρδαλις) presaging the advent of the "four kings that will rise from the earth".

As to the episode of the founding of Alexandria in Egypt, which Malalas presents generally in accordance with the *Alexander Romance* (1.31-33 Kroll), albeit very concisely, it, on the contrary, could not be ignored by John of Nikiu. Indeed, it was directly relevant to the past of his motherland, which he took special interest in, as is clearly seen from his work. However, the chronicler introduces this episode in a truncated version. Apart from mentioning the fact of Alexandria's founding, John of Nikiu only preserved the information about the name of the earlier settlement existing in its place, adding on his own initiative (maybe not without a feeling of patriotism) that this name is in Egyptian³². The fact that he omitted Malalas' indication of Alexander's sacrificing a young virgin girl³³ and building temples in Alexandria, including the temple of Serapis, can be put down to the chronicler's unwillingness to record, when there was no special need for that, the events connected with paganism he abhorred. Apparently, it was for the same reason that John of Nikiu also neglected to

³⁰ What we see here is clearly an example of textual corruption. Indeed, it is highly improbable that either John of Nikiu's source or he himself could accept as true such sheer nonsense. At the same time, it is difficult to say what name (instead of this *Yulyanos*) the chronicler actually mentioned in this sentence.

³¹ Such an image of Alexander can already be found in *Excerpta latina barbari* (p. 244 Frick), a Latin translation (mid-Eighth Century AD) of an early Byzantine chronicle compiled in Greek in Alexandria (late Fifth Century AD). On Alexander as God's instrument in the writing of Malalas, see JOUANNO 2001, 96; 2018b, 464.

³² See n. 14.

³³ It is interesting that there is not a single word of human sacrifices in the *Alexander Romance*. Therefore this episode and any other similar ones appearing occasionally in Malalas' writing (JOUANNO 2001, 96 n. 14) are but additions introduced by the chronicler himself (or by the source he drew on). In doing so, Malalas conveys prejudices, already common enough by his days, suggesting that in the earlier times human sacrifices were made on a regular basis, and he thus demonstrates the horrific customs of pagans. For such prejudices, see, in particular, CHUVIN 2011, 257-258.

mention Malalas' record on Alexander's offering a sacrifice at the tomb of Achilles in Troy and his prayer to the hero's spirit for help in battles (along with Malalas' remark about Alexander's genealogy).

It is also noteworthy how John of Nikiu transcribes Malalas' record of Alexander's arrival in Byzoupolis and Diskoi/Chrysopolis, i.e. the places associated with where Constantinople later sprung up³⁴. It is obvious that it was a result of a poor abridgement of Malalas' text that these two sites merged into one, namely Chrysopolis (which, it seems, happened, because John of Nikiu failed to identify Byzoupolis as Byzantion). At the same time, it should be believed that although John of Nikiu cites the legend that explained the name of Chrysopolis, he did not feel any particular interest in the place (it cannot be ruled out that the chronicler was also vaguely aware of its location), but just wished to underscore Alexander's generosity, the trait he most probably considered important in this monarch.

The further narrative of Malalas, where he speaks of Alexander's conquests, underwent significant contraction in John of Nikiu's *Chronicle*. He only preserved Malala's information (in the form of a single comment) about Alexander's seizing the Persian empire and bringing it under his control, while he himself made an addition about exterminating Darius' troops, but omitted Malalas' indication on the Persian king's slaying. There seems no mystery as to the reason for such an approach of John of Nikiu to his source in this case. Indeed, while the chronicler already mentioned of Darius' demise above (51.62-63) and thus presumably did not find a need to repeat this information once more, he obviously considered the rest of the narrative to be of little consequence for his writing (particularly since Malalas mentions Alexander's defeat of Darius and his conquering the Persian kingdom twice, albeit providing different details each time). What John of Nikiu, however, found important and therefore included this fact in his narrative is Malalas' indication on Alexander's marrying Roxana, who is called Darius' daughter in line with the *Alexander Romance* (2.20,22 Kroll). It is also notable that John of Nikiu added to this information his own remark that the Macedonian king did not mistreat her. It may be assumed that by doing this, John of Nikiu brings to readers' attention another important trait Alexander possessed, namely his leniency towards women. At any rate, it is telling that this same trait is mentioned by John of Nikiu at the beginning of another episode, the episode about Candace, to whom the conqueror, according to the chronicler, did no harm either.

The story of queen Candace (which attained huge popularity not only in Byzantine literature) also stems from the *Alexander Romance* (3.18-23 Kroll)³⁵, whence it was

³⁴ This account, which clearly attempts to conflate the history of the Macedonian king and Constantinople, is naturally absent in the *Alexander Romance* that was created before (see n. 24) Constantine the Great moved the capital to Byzantion. Byzoupolis is "the city of Byzas", the legendary founder of Byzantion (see further in Malalas: 12.20; 13.7 Thurn). On Byzas, see STOLL 1884; MILLER 1898; and now especially RUSSELL 2017, 205-241. Contrary to Malalas' statement, Chrysopolis existed under this name before Alexander's time (AVRAM 2004, 981). For the legend about the connection between Alexander and Constantinople cited by Malalas, and other such legends found in later Byzantine literature, see BERGER 2016.

³⁵ The *Alexander Romance* (and hence Malalas' text) contained an error prevalent in Ancient literature that Candace was a personal name. In reality that was a title which in the Kingdom of Kush/Meroë (see below) was borne by some female members of the royal family (*kdke/ktke* apparently means either "the king's mother" or "the king's sister") starting from the Third Century BC at the latest (Bion Sol. *FGrHist* 668 F 5.1 = *Schol. Act. Apost.* 8:27). During the First Century BC and the First Century AD a number of these women successively ruled the Kingdom of Meroë, consolidating absolute power in their hands. For more on this, see e.g. HAKEM 1981, 302-304; ZACH 1992; SALL 1994; TÖRÖK 1997, 205, 213-214; besides, see *FHN* II 85 (with commentary). On the possible origin of the Candace story in the *Alexander*

taken by Malalas (or his source), who drastically abridged and somewhat changed it. Apart from some other discrepancies between the story in Malalas' work and the *Alexander Romance*, one fact is very conspicuous. In his writing Malalas places Candace's kingdom in India (she reigned over "the Indians of the interior": τῶν ἐνδοτέρων Ἰνδῶν)³⁶, while Ps.-Callisthenes calls her the "queen of Meroë" (3.18 Kroll: βασίλισσα Κανδάκη Μερῶης; *ibid.*: βασίλισσα Κανδάκη ἡ ἐν Μερῶῃ), and thus historically her lands should have been in Africa, in Nubia/Ethiopia, i.e. should constitute the Kingdom of Kush with the capital at Meroë³⁷. However, this mistake of Malalas seems somewhat excusable. The account of Candace in the *Alexander Romance* contains much of what would make a reader (ignorant of where the Kingdom of Meroë was really situated) think that its location was in India³⁸. Moreover, it is interesting that Malalas writes about Alexander's setting off to conquer Ethiopia immediately after subjugating Candace, while there is no such information in the *Alexander Romance*. Hence it turns out that although Malalas stopped short of separating her kingdom from Ethiopia (apparently the Nubian elements of this account did not remain without his attention after all), he assumed that this country bordered India, which was in line with one of the notions already existing in the Ancient epoch when India and Ethiopia were conflated or sometimes placed next to each other³⁹.

It is remarkable that John of Nikiu does not repeat this mistake of Malalas. For him Candace is the queen of Abyssinia/Ethiopia, although he also considered (further mentioning this in his *Chronicle*) that the Abyssinians and Indians live in neighbouring lands (90.71). The explanation why John of Nikiu corrects Malalas' information in this case may be as follows: he was also familiar with the account of Candace from another source whose reference to her as the queen of Ethiopia and not India he found more credible⁴⁰. It is difficult to determine what source it was precisely. But it definitely was not the *Alexander Romance*, because there is no reason to believe that the chronicler read it immediately (besides, it was by no means necessarily that John of Nikiu was able to correctly locate the Kingdom of Meroë which by then had disappeared relatively long before)⁴¹. At the same time, it cannot be ruled out that John of Nikiu's correction was caused (either directly or more likely additionally, i.e. in addition to the information he borrowed from some source) by a passage from the *Acts of the Apostles* (8:27). In fact, another Candace called here the "queen of the Ethiopians" (βασίλισσα Αἰθιοπῶν)

Romance from the episode of Cleophis, the queen of the Indian Assaceniens (Curt. 8.10.22-36; Just. 12.7.9-11), see BERVE 1926, 214 n° 435; 421, n°. 36; HECKEL 2006, 90-91. On the hypothesis about the influence of the story of Thalestris, the queen of the Amazons (D.S. 17.77.1-3; Curt. 6.5.24-32; Just. 12.5-7; cf. Plu. *Alex.* 46.1-2), in this case too, see JOUANNO 2001, 95 n. 11; for the story, see, in particular, BERVE 1926, 419, n° 26; HECKEL 2006, 262-263.

³⁶ Similarly: Ioann. Antioch. fr. 28 Mariev; Georg. Mon. 1. p. 33 de Boor; *Suda* s.v. Ἀλέξανδρος (cf. s.v. Κανδάκη, where she is, however, called "the queen of the Ethiopians"); cf. Georg. Cedren. 1. p. 266 Bekker. Besides, cf. Mich. Glyc. *Ann.* 141 Migne.

³⁷ Usually in Greek and Roman literature by Ethiopia was meant this kingdom located in the territory of ancient Nubia (occasionally there could be found a broader interpretation: the whole of Africa south of Lybia and Egypt). On the Kushite/Meroitic kingdom, see e.g. SHINNIE 1978a; LECLANT 1981; HAKEM 1981; TÖRÖK 1997; LOHWASSER 2013; WOLF-NOWOTNICK 2020; GRZYMSKI 2020.

³⁸ SCHNEIDER 2004, 131-132, 345-348; SZALC 2014; NAWOTKA 2017, 214-219.

³⁹ For this, now see particularly SCHNEIDER 2004.

⁴⁰ The fact that in the *Suda* Candace's kingdom, when referred to for the second time, is located not in India, like in the first mention, but in Ethiopia (see n. 36), indicates that the Lexicon's author used an alternative source in this case. Besides, on Candace as ruler of Meroë, see Ioann. Tzetz. *Chil.* 3.888 Leone.

⁴¹ *Ca.* 350 AD.

could well have suggested the idea to him that the Candace who encountered Alexander was similar.

As to the rest of the account of Candace, John of Nikiu does not diverge significantly from Malalas. The discrepancies mostly originate from the former's abridging (sometimes in a poor way) the latter's text. At any rate, it seems unfortunate that, unlike Malalas, John of Nikiu keeps readers uninformed about the way Candace managed to identify Alexander who visited her in disguise. At the same time, it may be no coincidence that the chronicler decided to omit the description of the Macedonian king's appearance, which Malalas (or his source) took from another part of the *Alexander Romance* (1.13 Kroll) and cited with a number of changes. It cannot be ruled out that such specific physical characteristics as short stature, but particularly large prominent teeth, let alone *heterochromia* (which was sometimes attributed to the devil)⁴² were viewed as ominous by John of Nikiu and therefore incompatible with the favourable image of Alexander he sought to create in his writing, also by means of including the story of Candace in it. Indeed, this story, as presented by John of Nikiu, depicts Alexander as not only lenient towards women (like in the case of Roxana before), but also a wise king able to appreciate another ruler's intelligence. (Incidentally, it is interesting that the motive of Alexander's masquerading as his ambassador, which is present in Malalas' story of Candace, is completely neglected by John of Nikiu –it seems that in his opinion, cunning was not a trait befitting the Macedonian king.) On the other hand, we may assume that for John of Nikiu including the account of Candace in his text was important for another reason. In doing so, he was able to present a noteworthy event in the history of a country which was not only situated nearby his native Egypt, but also had close ties to it in the past and especially now when its Monophysite church was under both spiritual and administrative authority of the Patriarchate of Alexandria⁴³. It appears that the above-mentioned reasons (an opportunity by means of the story of Candace to paint Alexander's portrait in more detail and also to present a notable chapter of Ethiopian history) made this story important in John of Nikiu's eyes, deserving of taking up a third of the main account of the Macedonian king.

Regarding the final part of this account, it is also a truncated version of the respective portion of Malalas' text. John of Nikiu only mentions that on his deathbed Alexander divided his kingdom between his four companions (according to the chronicler's further report, they, like in Malalas, were Philip III Arrhidaeus, Ptolemy Lagus, Antigonus the One-Eyed and Seleucus). It is obvious that John of Nikiu did not see fit to copy the dry statistics concerning the reign of Alexander and his conquests that Malalas places in his text to bring the report on the Macedonian king to conclusion. Presumably John of Nikiu considered that such information merely can add nothing valuable to what he had already written about Alexander. Generally speaking, John of Nikiu, insofar as we are

⁴² JOUANNO 2001, 95 n. 12. For Alexander's appearance in the *Alexander Romance*, see NAWOTKA 2017, 70-71. However, Nawotka makes a misstatement claiming that apart from Ps.-Callisthehes, the only author attributing *heterochromia* to Alexander was John Tzetzes (Ioann. Tzetz. *Chil.* 11.90-93 Leone). See NAWOTKA 2017, 71. In doing so, the scholar dismisses the relevant indication in Malalas (additionally, see Georg. Mon. 1. p. 33 de Boor; Mich. Glyc. *Ann.* 141 Migne, both following Malalas in this case).

⁴³ The adoption of Christianity in the Kingdom of Aksum happened *ca.* the mid-Fourth Century, while in the Nubian kingdoms, emerging after the collapse of Meroë, it took place *ca.* the mid-Sixth Century. After the Council of Chalcedon (451) the Monophysite church became dominant in Aksum, as well as soon in the large part of Nubian territories. See SHINNIE 1978a, 259-265; 1978b; MEKOURIA 1981; MICHALOWSKI 1981; MUNRO-HAY 1991, 202-213; PHILLIPSON 2012.

able to judge, preferred to omit various calculations, especially chronological ones, occasionally found in Malalas' writing.

In conclusion, it is evident that the story of Alexander occupies the principal place in John of Nikiu's account of the Macedonian kings of the Argead dynasty, while his report about Philip II and his remark on Philip III Arrhidaeus, both based on Malalas' respective information, play only a supportive role in it: they serve as connecting links between the main account of Alexander and the rest of John of Nikiu's narrative. In turn, it can be seen that although John of Nikiu took information on Alexander mostly from Malalas' work, there is every reason to think that he also drew on other sources in this connection. Unfortunately, it does not seem possible to identify them. Nevertheless, it is plain that with regard to the quality of information they offered, at least that concerning Alexander, their value was insignificant, not greater than the value of Malalas' writing. These sources were used by John of Nikiu either to supplement or to correct, when he considered it necessary, what he found in Malalas. However, the main thing that sets the text of John of Nikiu apart from the text of Malalas is the abridgements the former made. This task without a doubt was not carried out by him haphazardly, solely for the purpose of reducing the length of Malalas' text, but in a rather measured way (although there are a number of poor abridgements in his narrative of Alexander), proceeding from certain principles: John of Nikiu included in his work everything that seemed important and credible to him, as well as befitting the image of Alexander he intended to create in his *Chronicle*. Likewise, undoubtedly, John of Nikiu's own supplements were to contribute to the creation of such an image too.

It is thus clear that in contrast to John of Nikiu's information about Philip II and Philip III Arrhidaeus, the account of Alexander found in his *Chronicle* is far from being merely a truncated version of the corresponding story given by Malalas, but has a certain self-sufficiency. Therefore, in my opinion, it can be well assumed that the image of Alexander presented by John of Nikiu holds a special, albeit quite modest, place among the portraits of the great conqueror we find in the Byzantine world's literature.

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